

10 November 1975

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Training
THROUGH : Chief, Intelligence Institute
SUBJECT : "Limits to Growth" Conference

1. From October 19-21, 1975 I attended the First Biennial "Limits to Growth" Conference, held at The Woodlands Inn, a conference center about 20 miles north of Houston, Texas. The Conference was co-sponsored by the Club of Rome, the University of Houston, and the Mitchell Energy and Development Corporation. It was attended by over 300 business leaders, scientists, government officials, and university professors. Dr. Dennis Meadows of Dartmouth, co-author of the Club of Rome's "Limits to Growth" report in 1972, served as conference chairman.
2. The keynote speaker was Dr. Sicco Mansholt of the Netherlands, former president of the European Common Market, who warned that "catastrophies are unavoidable" for the world's peoples in the next 25 years unless there are fundamental changes in attitudes and distribution of wealth, together with a restoration of nature and ecological balance. He noted that famine already grips Bangladesh and the drought-stricken belts of Africa. If it spreads through major regions such as India, Mansholt said, it could lead to destructive "civil war." Jay Forrester of MIT, who devised the computer modeling on which "The Limits to Growth" was based, agreed with Mansholt that there is increasing global awareness and concern over the problems of growth. Both Mansholt and Forrester stressed that solutions must and will come from peoples rather than governments.
3. Dennis Meadows noted that unending economic growth has traditionally been regarded as the solution to the world's problems. He pointed out, though, that after 20 years of unprecedented growth, we have a widening gap between the rich and the poor. Meadows emphasized that alternatives to growth does not mean "no growth" and an end to humanity's progress.

4. Opposing viewpoints cropped up at many points during the Conference. Senator Jacob Javits of New York discussed the Balanced Growth and Economic Planning Act which he and Senator Humphrey had introduced earlier this year. Essentially the bill's purpose is to develop a "Balanced Growth Policy" that strives to meet our basic needs for housing, education, jobs, public service, a healthy and better environment, and sets our priorities in these areas and proposals for achieving these goals. The Javits-Humphrey bill would create a three member Economic Planning Board in the Executive Office of the President. Two other Senators, John Culver of Iowa, and Mike Gravel of Alaska, challenged both the concept and need for this type of legislation as did many of the business leaders.

5. Four prominent panelists on the world-wide energy crisis were at odds as to the solution of the problem. Amory Lovins, consultant for the United Nations Environmental Program, said the problems of nuclear energy are great enough to warrant abandonment of this approach to the world's energy needs. Energy consumption does not need to increase to achieve social goals, he said, and U.S. energy consumption could be cut in half. Lovins was immediately challenged by Harry E. Bovay, Jr., president of the National Society of Professional Engineers, who said "an energy shortage means a job shortage, and a job shortage means depression." Bovay felt that engineers and scientists are capable of advances that can continue to supply our needs indefinitely. The third panelist (whose views were reflected by a number of other speakers) was Iranian ambassador-at-large, Jahangir Amouzegar, who warned of the social and political limits to growth. The third world nations, he stated, are not asking the world not to grow, but are asking for shared growth. The fourth panelist in this session, Alvin F. Hildebrandt of the University of Houston, was highly optimistic about the future use of solar energy capabilities on a commercially feasible basis. Solar energy, he predicted, could meet 10 to 20 per cent of U.S. energy requirements by the end of the century.

6. Herman Kahn of the Hudson Institute propounded his well-known optimistic view toward growth--vehemently disagreeing with Dennis Meadows and the Club of Rome group. Growth is inevitable, desirable, and there are virtually no limits to what technology can do, according to Kahn. He projects the world 200 years hence as having 15 billion people with a \$20,000 per capita income and a gross world product of \$300 trillion. Kahn was easily the most controversial speaker at the Conference, not only because of his thesis, but also

because of his manner and tone. He was described by various people at my table in such terms as: "brilliant", "gross", "obscene", and "he's the only guy who has his head on straight." His views of course, were most acceptable to the oil industry executives present.

7. One of the most thoughtful presentations, and one with considerable implications for intelligence, was made by Lester Brown, former AID and Dept. of Agriculture official who is now president of the Worldwatch Institute. Brown traced the increasing dependency on the "North American breadbasket" over the past 25 years. In the 1960's, while economic planners emphasized industrial growth at the expense of agriculture, the Green Revolution was launched, and food production surged ahead in countries like India, Pakistan, Turkey, Mexico and the Philippines. In the 70's, according to Brown, the food pendulum has swung back; food shortages are rampant and have contributed to global double-digit inflation and political instability.

As one example of the devastating role of rapid population growth, Brown compared population growth in North America and Latin America. While North America's population has stabilized, Latin America's has escalated at an explosive rate. Several Latin American countries such as Mexico, Venezuela, Peru and Brazil have annual population growth rates of 3% or more, a rate which leads to a nineteenfold population increase within a century. Another significant point made by Brown was that political expediency has prompted governments to favor industry over agriculture and the interests of vocal urban populations over those of rural food producers. The Soviet Union, Brown felt, provides one example of how agricultural inefficiency and political expediency combine to undermine efforts at increasing food production.

Brown's solution: deepening interdependence in the world will require a global food strategy. The backbone of this strategy should be a worldwide effort to slow down population growth, and to reduce over-consumption among the world's more affluent people. Failure to cope with food shortages, ecological deterioration, and overpopulation could lead to major economic, political and social upheavals in many parts of the world.

8. The format of the Conference consisted of early morning and evening plenary sessions, and "concurrent panels" which were held throughout the day. It was only possible, therefore, to attend a few of the 14 different panel discussions which were held. I was, however, able to exchange ideas with others who had attended different panel sessions, and to get a pretty clear picture of the total thrust of the Conference.

Some of the panelists handed out papers in advance, which also made it possible to gain a broader perspective.

9. In a private conversation with Dennis Meadows, I mentioned that we were looking forward to having him on our Guest Speaker Program in January, 1976. Meadows said he was pleased to have been invited, and went on to say that he felt our Agency was in the forefront in government circles in recognizing the problems which were being raised and discussed at the Conference.

10. One of my major purposes in attending the Conference was to look for new themes, topics, and ideas which could be introduced into the Senior Seminar or other OTR courses, and to look for new guest speaker possibilities. I can see valid reasons for including a "Limits to Growth" approach in various segments of the Senior Seminar: the Domestic Block, the International Block, and the Science Block. (Some speakers in the present Seminar have addressed themselves pro or con to this theme.) Among speakers for possible consideration are the following:

Amory Lovins, UN Consultant
William Ophuls, Political Commentator
Donald N. Michaels, Prof. of Organizational Behavior,
University of Michigan
Robert Theobald, Author and Futurist
Senator Mike Gravel (will be speaking in current
Senior Seminar)
Mrs. Jean Houston, Foundation for Mind Research
(a colleague of Margaret Mead)
John Richardson, American University (Associated
with Club of Rome project "Mankind at the Turning
Point")
Elliot Janeway, Economic Columnist and Publisher
Lester Brown, Worldwatch Institute

11. Regarding Senator Gravel, I had the pleasure of dining with him and an aide, Bob Mitchell, the first evening of the Conference. In a later discussion with Mitchell, I asked if he thought the Senator might be interested in meeting with one of our future Seminars. Mitchell's reaction was positive. On returning to Washington, I contacted George Cary who commented favorably on Senator Gravel, and suggested that since he (Cary) had not had time to line up another Congressman for the present Seminar, we might want to invite Senator Gravel to speak to our present group. Arrangements were subsequently made through Bob Mitchell, and the Senator will be with us the afternoon of 18 November. Senator Gravel has been instrumental in proposing "Law of the Sea" legislation and has also been involved in other congressional matters related to environmental and ecological problems.

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12. A few days after returning from Houston I briefed the current Senior Seminar on the Conference program and the issues discussed. Considerable interest was aroused (more than I expected!) and the group asked if they could view the Herman Kahn tape of his auditorium performance at the Agency, and continue informal discussions of these problems, in terms of their intelligence implications, at a later date, possibly during the last week at [REDACTED]. We plan to do this.

13. In summary, the Conference was worthwhile and stimulating because of the importance of the theme and the wide diversity of scholars, economists, government officials, corporation executives and others who brought their expertise and opinions to bear on these perplexing and significant problems. The Conference will convene again in two years-- location to be announced. I would recommend that the Agency send several observers next time so that complete coverage of the Conference can be obtained.

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Chief, Senior Seminars Branch